
7. ENVIRONMENT POLICY

Preamble

NSW Teachers Federation recognises the preservation of our natural environment and addressing environmental challenges such as climate change is union business. As workers who are educators, our members have a role in encouraging the growth of a clean economy that will be safe and prosperous for future generations.

Federation members, together with the vast majority of Australian citizens, understand the environmental imperative for action in regard to addressing the current damage to the environment and the consequential acceleration of climate change due to human activity. This should involve not only solutions to current challenges, but the implementation of policies, practices and infrastructure to support an environmentally sound and sustainable future for all.

This involves a move towards energy production and supply which is not only “clean” in its production, but is both sustainable and renewable. Energy generated through wind, solar or wave powered means can deliver on this essential premise. Further, such forms of energy production will not create the problems or dangers for some communities in terms of waste management that continue to exist in the production of other forms of energy such as nuclear power.

Government has a crucial role to play in being responsible for sustainable public infrastructure. Federation will continue to remind all Australian governments of their responsibilities in this regard. Federation remains opposed to the privatisation of energy and water supply and provision. Australian communities are entitled to hold energy and water providers publicly accountable for the quality, delivery and maintenance of supply that is both safe and environmentally sustainable. Recent examples of shameless corporate interest and greed at the expense of both environmental and human wellbeing are clearly evident in the nuclear disaster at Fukushima, the recent BP Oil “spill” in the Gulf of Mexico as well as the burning oil leak off the NW Australia coastline which not only spread damage across precious, environmentally sensitive areas of Australia but caused significant natural and economic misery across communities in East Timor. Governments must ensure strong regulation and controls will be implemented for what corporations refuse to accept responsibility for the damage to both landscape and the livelihood of communities.

Energy sources must be renewable and safe. The development of nuclear energy for general use in Australia is NOT an option to be supported when calling for “clean” energy, and the Federation remains opposed to the establishment of nuclear power stations in Australia.

Public education has a crucial role to play at the forefront of any plan to ensure an ecologically sustainable future. Investment needs to allow provision for environmental education, training for green jobs and creating informed future generations. Teachers and schools continue to play a key part through the educational programs both in and out of the classroom with students, parents and broader school communities. Teachers cannot continue to do this work without appropriate resources and support which need to be provided by governments through the Department of Education and Communities. Together with programs in schools, the pivotal role of TAFE in providing relevant courses and research must be recognised and funded accordingly.

Price on Pollution

There is an environmental imperative to act. The introduction of a price on carbon pollution is fundamental if Australia is committed to shifting to a low carbon economy.

Until industry is provided with an incentive to change the way energy is produced, pollution levels will continue to rise.

The Federation broadly agrees with the timetable proposed by the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee, for a pollution price mechanism with a fixed price commencing in 2012, followed by consideration of the introduction of an effective emission trading scheme within three to five years.

The pollution price system must:

- Reduce carbon pollution
- Safeguard workers, communities and regions dependent on emissions intensive industries
- Ensure investment in research, skills and training through public education providers so workers can make the most of the opportunities a low carbon economy can provide
- Provide assistance for low (and middle) income households

Towards a New Economy

Endless consumption poses huge risks for people and communities around the globe. Nowhere is safe from resultant pollution and environmental degradation. Instead, we should be encouraged to think and live as if we *are* the environment. In David Suzuki's words, "*we are made up of air, water, soil and with their degradation we cannot survive.*"

Now is the time for the transition to a low pollution economy and for clean energy jobs to be established, as well as to take action to better "green" current industry and employment.

The Federation calls on government to invest in skills and training so that workers and industry can make the most of the opportunities that a low carbon economy can provide. TAFE as a public education and training provider has a key role, not only in the delivery of quality training, but in the planning of skills development and training.

Planning that involves government, unions and business will be the most effective means of delivering clean energy industry and products, focussed in communities where jobs are most needed.

Federation members, along with other members of the union movement, have often been deeply involved in their local communities in opposing rampant and unwanted development that has threatened heritage buildings, and natural environments. The NSW Teachers Federation will continue to support such community based campaigning, where appropriate, in the context of the union's decision-making procedures.

Action

Federation Council in September 2007 adopted a policy on Environment and Global Warming which committed the Federation to undertake a number of actions. (see Appendix 1). This remains a work in progress, and while several of those actions have been completed, others are, by their nature, ongoing. Some will need to be revisited and reshaped to better address environmental situations as they currently exist, or will exist in the future.

Further to those previous actions, the Federation will:

1. Continue to support the ACTU and AEU Environment policies and activities, including lobbying in support of a sustainable low carbon economy which includes a price on polluters and pollution.

2. Advocate the position that the burden of transition to a cleaner, more sustainable economy must be borne overwhelmingly by the big industrial polluters.
3. Write to the Federal Government and Opposition calling for the introduction of a fair carbon price policy as a first step towards a sustainable low carbon economy, which must include massive investment in large scale solar thermal and wind projects as soon as possible.
4. Develop a segment of environmental training to be embedded in Trade Union Training courses, as appropriate.
5. Establish a Sustainable Environment Restricted Committee consisting of five Councillors (two country Councillors, two city Councillors, one TAFE Councillor, one Executive member plus an officer attached) with responsibility for supporting the implementation of Federation policy through the development of appropriate resources for members, including adequate information about the role of public education in the transition from a growth-oriented economy to a more stable and sustainable economic model.
6. Establish an Environmental Contact position in each local teachers association.
7. Call on the DEC to commit to providing system-wide support in the development and implementation of school environment management plans. This support should include, but not be limited to, the establishment of a school environment officer with appropriate resourcing and training.
8. Call on the DEC to continue to work towards making public schools more environmentally sustainable and energy efficient.
9. Promote debate by experts, leaders, academics, spokespeople and other appropriate people on alternative, environmentally stable and sustainable economic systems and living standards. Federation will also continue to affiliate and connect with groups and organisations which seek to have an involvement in education around environmental issues.
10. Work with other unions to develop future policy and strategy on the phasing out of Australia's reliance on fossil fuels as our primary energy source and major export earner.
11. Restate its opposition to State Government attempts to privatise electricity and energy supply and urge greater government investment in alternative, ecologically appropriate energy sources. Federation will support other unions in their campaign of opposition of privatisation of energy. Likewise the Federation will oppose any attempt to privatise water services.
12. Resist attempts to make ordinary Australians pay for environmental protection. The biggest polluters must be held accountable.
13. Lobby government to ensure residential rental properties are energy efficient.
14. Promote the work of teachers and schools by devoting a page of the journal per term to the actions of teachers and schools.

The Federation supports the (1) AEU Environment Policy, and (2) the ACTU document *Climate Change is Union Business*.

ENVIRONMENT AND GLOBAL WARMING

Decision of Council September 2007

NSW Teachers Federation recognises that preservation of the natural environment and climate change is the most significant challenge confronting our planet today. Teachers have a responsibility to do all that they can to ensure that students learn about how to work towards making Australia and the rest of our planet environmentally sustainable.

Global warming and the over exploitation of the planet's natural resources present a challenge requiring urgent and significant action. Many governments have shown an unwillingness to seriously pursue a reduction in global warming or switch to modes of non nuclear sustainable development. If action is not taken there will be an increase in:

- The already large gap between rich and poor nations
- Forced migration
- Global conflict over access to resources
- Degradation of the environment for all.

Conference believes that global justice cannot be achieved without developed countries reducing their ecological footprints and supporting non nuclear sustainable development in the poorest and most vulnerable regions of the world. It is incumbent on the technologically-advanced nations to make freely available the technology and resources for non nuclear sustainable development.

As a union committed to social justice, the Federation will increase its advocacy on global warming and the environment at the international, national and local levels.

Australia has become a significantly disproportionate contributor to global warming. In fact, Australia produces the highest amount of greenhouse gas emissions per capita of any country in the world, at a rate of ten times the world average. Some 47% of Australia's carbon dioxide emissions arise from energy creation, most notably 30% from coal-powered electricity generation, 19% from agriculture and 14% from transport. Our communities are already suffering from the social and economic impacts of drought.

The Howard Government has failed to give a priority to environmental issues. It has failed to join the international community in ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. It has largely sought to avoid its responsibilities and in some cases sought to mitigate its lack of action by promoting long-term environmentally harmful proposals such as nuclear power. The issues arising from the level of carbon emissions, global warming, inefficient energy use, land degradation, land clearing, misuse of water resources, water wastage and shortages are just some of the issues that the Howard Government has not been prepared to confront in any comprehensive way.

The NSW Government has also been slow to address major environmental issues. Initiatives such as the NSW Environmental Education Plan and the program to install solar panels in schools are welcome. The large backlog in the maintenance of schools and TAFE colleges has contributed to energy inefficiencies and so provides a poor model for students in how to live and work in the future. The NSW Government's failure to invest in public infrastructure has contributed to:

- an over reliance on private car and truck transport at the expense of public transport
- water shortages and the failure to embrace water recycling and minimisation of water wastage
- the failure to significantly reduce carbon emissions from coal-fired power stations
- the inadequate provision of energy efficient eco-friendly buildings including affordable housing.

Public education must be at the forefront of any plan to create an environmentally sustainable future. It has a key role in helping both students and the community understand the both the issues and how both individual and collective behaviour affects the environment. The integration of sustainability issues into education and training is essential. Apart from programs in schools, the pivotal role of TAFE and universities in providing

relevant courses, skills development and research, especially in the emerging low-carbon energy technologies, must be recognised and funded accordingly.

The trade union movement must also embrace an environmentally-sustainable future. To date the Teachers Federation has taken a number of steps towards this goal, including ensuring that Federation House incorporated measures designed to reduce the Federation's impact on the environment and purchasing a number of hybrid vehicles for the Federation's fleet. Nevertheless, the Federation must demonstrate its practical commitment to the environment by embracing additional measures that will significantly reduce the union's environmental footprint.

Action

The Federation will:

1. lobby through the Australian Education Union, Unions NSW and at like-minded organisations for the Australian Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and any similar agreements designed to improve the world's environment. Lobbying should also be undertaken to seek a significant increase in Australia's foreign aid to support environmentally non-nuclear sustainable development in poor countries.
2. make representations to the Minister for Education and Training for the establishment of a tripartite committee to oversee a comprehensive environmental audit of DET premises, operations and policies. Recommendations should be designed to significantly lessen the DET's environmental footprint and promote the environmental sustainability of schools and TAFE colleges, and ensure that all schools and TAFE facilities are based on high standards of sustainability.
3. continue to lobby DET and the Government to increase funding for maintenance and to ensure building codes for new school and TAFE facilities conform to the highest standards of sustainability. The DET and the Government must take responsibility for building and maintaining appropriate facilities for the environment they are placed in. Schools cannot be built to a standard set of codes which results in the construction of 'one size fits all' buildings. To do this DET must move away from a modular building format and adopt a more flexible design for schools based on climate and other environmental concerns.
4. raise with the State government and DET the need to develop a statewide approach regarding the purchasing and installation of environmentally friendly equipment and technologies in order to achieve economies of scale and to streamline the whole process.
5. re-state its opposition to State government attempts to privatise electricity and energy supply, and urge greater government investment in alternative, ecologically appropriate energy sources. Federation will support other unions in their campaign of opposition to privatisation of energy.
6. pursue the development of a package of TAFE sustainability education and training with the aim of embedding this throughout its syllabuses and courses.
7. pursue with the DET and the Board of Studies a review of existing syllabuses to facilitate the incorporation of environmental and ecological sustainability topics and related skills where appropriate.
8. pursue with TAFE the development and wide delivery of new courses in renewable energies.
9. pursue the establishment of a comprehensive program of professional development programs for all teachers in environmental education and sustainability.
10. support and promote curricula, resources and teaching methods that enable learners to develop the values, skills and knowledge to live and work sustainably.
11. pursue a national agreement to incorporate general environmental practices, as well as industry specific sustainability skills, in all training packages.
12. conduct a comprehensive environmental audit of the Federation premises and activities. Appropriate recommendations from these audits will be implemented and reported to Annual Conference 2008.

13. prepare guidance material to assist members to assess and promote environmental improvements in their workplaces and included in these will be advice relating to sustainable energy systems and efficient water usage.

This will also include environment and sustainable energy solutions information to be published in the journal under a new section entitled "Eduenviro" or some other catchphrase to attract members' attention, which would contain concise facts and details designed to educate readers.

14. That Federation have discussions with the DET to investigate the Schools Climate-Com Scheme in the Hunter, monitoring and lessening energy use and effects on the environment of each school, and facilitate the spread of the scheme across the State.

15. explore the establishment of an annual award for student-designed posters on environmental issues, with the best to be published and distributed to schools and TAFE colleges to promote environmental awareness.

16. support and promote the development, in partnership with all similarly-minded organisations, curricula, resources and teaching methods that enable learners to develop the values, skills and knowledge to live and work sustainably.

17. distribute guidance material to assist members to understand and access intergenerational, environmental, social, economic and health costs associated with the proposed introduction of nuclear energy as one option in dealing with climate change.

18. continue to lobby appropriate organizations about the desirability of providing access to options for ecologically sustainable and socially responsible investment.

19. oppose the establishment of nuclear power stations in Australia.

20. negotiate with DET the matter of concessional periods allocated to schools to ensure teachers receive release time to ensure DET policy such as Environmental Sustainability is implemented as intended.

21. in order to ensure the further progress of Federation's activities regarding this issue, hold a major conference open to all members to be held in 2008, as soon as practicable. The Conference will concern itself with a range of environmental issues, and aim to generate wider membership involvement and activism on this issue.

22. encourage its members to participate in the 'Walk Against Warming' rallies being coordinated through the Nature Conservation Council of NSW for the Sunday thirteen days before the 2007 Federal election.

23. review its use of language in discussing and documenting policies and communications dealing with environmental issues.